

Twelve River RIPPLES

Bagatelle



Here's a musing on the English language:

Defenceless

The English language is nothing if not unpredictable. Probably downright exasperating if you're trying to learn it. Take that little innocuous prefix 'de'. When you put it before 'regulate' or 'toxify', or even 'flea', we all know what's happening. The opposite. But place it before 'fend' or 'fence' and it only serves to strengthen the original intention of the word – to protect. Fending off a predator or fencing in one's property.

I was ruminating on 'defenceless' the other day. When you de-fence your property, you're tantamount to opening it up. It's a negative of the original intention. Does that signify, therefore, that 'defenceless' is a double negative? Does 'less' cancel out 'de' and bring back the status quo? Or is 'less' really more? I think I know the answer – more or less.

Can anyone think of other words like that? Ones we take so much for granted in modern common parlance but take them apart and the scenery changes.

Lynne Nesbit

So, there is your challenge for this month – to think of words in the English language that are, as Lynne says, unpredictable and exasperating. Send them to me, or if you're feeling inspired, put them into a poem. Email them to me by Thursday 17 November 2022. Good luck!

Simon Black
bagatelle@suffolkpoetrysociety.org